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Morte D'Arthur

By
Lord Tennyson

WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES BY

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MORTE D'ARTHUR

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,
King Arthur then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land

SELECTIONS FROM TENNYSON.

On one side lay the Ocean, and on one

Lay a great water, and the moon was full

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :

'The sequel of to-day unsolders all

The goodliest fellowship of famous knights

Whereof this world holds record Such a sleep

They sleep—the men I loved I think that we

Shall never more, at any future time,

Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,

Walking about the gardens and the halls

20

Of Camelot, as in the days that were

I perish by this people which I made,—

Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again

To rule once more—but let what will be, be,

I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm

That without help I cannot last till morn

Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,

Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how

In those old days, one summer noon, an arm

Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,

30

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,

Holding the sword—and how I rowed across

And took it, and have worn it, like a king .

And, wheresoever I am sung or told

In aftertime, this also shall be known.

But now delay not take Excalibur.

And fling him far into the middle mere.

Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere

'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,

40

Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm

A little thing may harm a wounded man.

Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,

Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept

And as the moon athwart the place of tombs,

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Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock, 50
Came on the shining levels of the lake

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jeweller— He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw—but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd

There in the many-knotted waterflags
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge
So strode he back slow to the wounded King

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere .
 ' Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?
 What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere .
 'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
 And the wild water lapping on the crag'

70

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale
 'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
 Not rendering true answer, as besem'd
 Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight
 For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
 Or voice, or else a motion of the mere
 This is a shameful thing for men to lie
 Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
 As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
 I bad thee, watch, and lightly bring me word'

80

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time

SELECTIONS FROM TENNYSON.

Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought,
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud,

‘ And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth, 90
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men
What good should follow this, if this were done ?

What harm, undone ? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule

Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself ?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does
What record, or what relic of my lord

Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt ? but were this kept, 100
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,

Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, “ King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills ”

So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence
But now much honour and much fame were lost ’

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit, 110
And hid Excalibur the second time,

And so strode back slow to the wounded King

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily
‘ What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? ’

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere

‘ I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds ’

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :

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'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me ! 120
 Authority forgets a dying king,
 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
 That bow'd the will I see thee what thou art,
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
 In whom should meet the offices of all,
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ,
 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence 130
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
 I will arise and slay thee with my hands '

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
 Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it The great brand
 Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
 And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock 140
 By night, with noises of the northern sea
 So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur .

But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere
 And lightly went the other to the King

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath
 'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done
 Speak out . what is it thou hast heard, or seen ?' 150

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere
 'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
 Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
 Nor shall see, here or elsewhere. till I die,

SELECTIONS FROM TENNYSON.

Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
 So great a miracle as yonder hilt
 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;
 But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 That caught him by the hilt and brandish'd him 160
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere '

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard
 ' My end draws nigh , 'tis time that I were gone
 Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
 And bear me to the margin , yet I fear
 My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die '

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
 Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
 And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
 As in a picture Him Sir Bedivere 170
 Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
 And would have spoken, but he found not words,
 Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
 O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
 And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
 When all the house is mute So sigh'd the King,
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, ' Quick, quick !
 I fear it is too late, and I shall die ' 180

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
 Larger than human on the frozen hills
 He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
 Before His own thought drove him, like a goad.
 Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
 And barren chasms, and all to left and right
 The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
 His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
 Sharp smitten with the dint of armed heels— 190

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And on a sudden, lo ! the level lake

And the long glories of the winter moon

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,

Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,

Beneath them , and descending they were ware

That all the decks were dense with stately forms

Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these

Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose

A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,

And, as it were one voice an agony 200

Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills

All night in a waste land, where no one comes,

Or hath come, since the making of the world

Then murmur'd Arthur, ' Place me in the barge,'

And to the barge they came There those three Queens

Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept

But she, that rose the tallest of them all

And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,

And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,

And call'd him by his name, complaining loud, 210

And dropping bitter tears against his brow

Striped with dark blood for all his face was white

And colourless, and like the wither'd moon

Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ,

And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops

Of onset , and the light and lustrous curls—

That made his forehead like a rising sun

High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ,

Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,

Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips

So like a shatter'd column lay the King , 221

Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,

From spur to plume a star of tournament,

Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged

Before the eyes of ladies and of kings

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,

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‘ Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?
 Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?
 For now I see the true old times are dead,
 When every morning brought a noble chance, 230
 And every chance brought out a noble knight
 Such times have been not since the light that led
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.

But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
 Which was an image of the mighty world ,
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,
 And the days darken round me, and the years,
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds ’

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge .
 ‘ The old order changeth, yielding place to new, 240
 And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world
 Comfort thyself what comfort is in me ?

I have lived my life, and that which I have done
 May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,
 Pray for my soul More things are wrought by prayer
 Than this world dreams of Wherefore, let thy voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day
 For what are men better than sheep or goats 250

That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

But now farewell I am going a long way
 With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
 To the island-valley of Avilion ,
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, 260
 Nor ever wind blows loudly , but it lies
 Deep meadow’d, happy, fair with orchard lawns

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And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound '

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS poem was first published in 1842

King Arthur had been made the hero of so many fictitious adventures by the romancers and poets of the Middle Ages that the belief was long held by many writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that he was an entirely mythical personage. Modern investigations, however, have proved that Arthur, or Artus, was the name of a sixth century war leader of the tribes inhabiting the old divisions of Britain known as Cumbria

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and Strathclyde (stretching from the Severn to the Clyde) against the encroaching Saxons from the East and the Picts and Scots from the North, and that five or six centuries later the name of King Arthur had come to stand for an ideal of royal wisdom, chivalric virtue, and knightly prowess, which was recognised alike in England, France, and Germany

The earliest legends of his exploits are to be found in the *Welsh Tales* and in the French and German *Romances of the Round Table*, the stories having crossed the Channel into Brittany, where they were embodied in Breton lays

Between 1130 and 1147, Geoffrey of Monmouth introduced the legends about King Arthur into his Latin *History of the Britons*

In 1196, Walter Map (or Mapes), Archdeacon of Oxford, gave spiritual life to the old tales recounting merely deeds of animal courage and passion, by introducing the legend of the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, an allegorical description of a good man's endeavour after a knowledge of truth and of God, to be gained only through a life of purity. *Holy Grail*, a translation of the word *Sancgreal*, was, the legends tell us, the dish used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch some of the blood of Christ as He hung wounded on the cross. Joseph brought the dish with him to England, where it was lost. The search for it, the 'Quest of the Holy Grail,' was undertaken by many of the knights of the Round Table. *Grail* is from the old French *grail*, Low Latin *gradale*, allied to the Greek *κράτηρ*, a cup, since the dish was confused with the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. See Tennyson's *Idyll of The Holy Grail*, where it is described as—

“The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad supper with his own”

The derivation of 'Sancgreal' from *Sanguis Realis*, the *real blood* of Christ, is erroneous, and has arisen from a wrong division of the letters, *san grael* being mistakenly written 'sang real'

Sir Thomas Malory, or Malore, an English knight, published in English his *Morte d'Arthur*, or *Death of Arthur*, an account, derived from French, Welsh, and English romances of the birth of Arthur, the formation of the knightly order of the Round Table, the exploits of the knights, and, finally, of Arthur's death or passing away. The book was printed by Caxton in 1485. It is from Malory's book that Tennyson derived most of the incidents narrated in his *Idylls of the King* and in the earlier *Morte d'Arthur*

Many other English authors have taken King Arthur as the central figure of their poems. Spenser, in his *Faery Queen*, makes 'Prince Arthure' the type of 'magnificence,' i.e. of 'noble deeds,' and under the figure of Arthure's knights represents the various virtues striving heavenwards and helped on their way by Arthure.

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By the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the legend of Arthur was regarded as purely the invention of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Milton originally intended to make Arthur the hero of his great epic, but doubting "who he was and whether any such reigned in history," rejected the Round Table as a subject in favour of the loss of Paradise.

Blackmore wrote two epics—*Prince Arthur* in ten books, and *King Arthur* in twelve books.

Dryden produced a dramatic opera entitled *King Arthur*, an allegory of the events of the reign of Charles II. He gives a melancholy account of a projected epic, with King Arthur or Edward the Black Prince as hero, in his *Essay on Satire*, cf. Scott, *Marmion*, canto 1 *Introd*.

In later times, Sir Walter Scott edited with notes the old romance of *Sir Tristrem*, and introduced into his *Bridal of Triermaine*, a story of King 'rthur's love for a fairy princess. In 1838 Lady Charlotte Guest published *The Mabinogion*, a translation into English of the Welsh legends contained in "the red book of Hergerst," which is in the library of Jesus College, Oxford. From *The Mabinogion* Tennyson has taken the framework of the story of his Idyll of *Geraint and Enid*.

In 1848 Bulwer Lytton produced an epic, in six-lined stanzas, entitled *King Arthur*.

Lastly, Tennyson in his earlier poems shows that the legends of King Arthur and his knights had taken hold of his youthful imagination. We are told that, when quite a boy, he chanced upon a copy of Malory's book, and often with his brothers held mimic tournaments after the fashion of Knights of the Round Table. In *The Palace of Art*, 105, Arthur is spoken of as "mythic Uther's deeply-wounded son," while the poems, *Sir Lancelot and Guinevere* (a fragment), *The Lady of Shalott*, *Sir Galahad*, and, finally, *Morte d'Arthur*, are all founded on incidents narrated in the legends. Tennyson's great work, *Idylls of the King*, as now published, is prefaced by *The Coming of Arthur*, an account of Arthur's mysterious birth and of his coronation, then comes *The Round Table*, a series of pictures of the feats of Arthur's knights and of the life at Arthur's court, and the whole concludes with *The Passing of Arthur*, an account of Arthur's last great battle and his death. In this last poem is incorporated the earlier *Morte d'Arthur*.

The *Morte d'Arthur* is introduced by some prefatory lines entitled *The Epic*, the thread of which is taken up again in some concluding lines added at the close. *The Epic* represents four friends sitting together on Christmas Eve, one of them, named Everard, is prevailed upon to read aloud portions of an epic poem which he had composed at college. The poem was originally in twelve books, but the author had thrown them into the fire as being "faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth,"

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in which "nothing new was said"; and the *Morte d'Arthur* is represented to be the only remaining fragment of the larger work. One of the friends, parson Holmes, had been lamenting "the general decay of faith right through the world," and it is as a kind of answer to his despondent talk that *Morte d'Arthur* is read aloud.

In *The Epic* and in the lines added at the conclusion of the original *Morte d'Arthur*, and again in the dedication *To the Queen* at the end of the last Idyll, Tennyson tells us of the moral purpose he has meant to infuse into his great work. The Arthur herein depicted is no mere reproduction of Geoffrey's or Malory's chivalric hero, and the interest of the poem does not lie in its being a picture of old times such as would please an antiquarian. Its purpose is to typify the continual struggle in man's heart between the lower and the higher instincts of his nature. It shadows "Sense at war with soul," evil fighting against good, and overcoming it. But the triumph of evil is short-lived. Excalibur may indeed be cast away and vanish from the earth, for, in the moral as in the physical world, without change there can be no progress. But "Arthur will come again," and new weapons from heaven will be given to the champions of Truth in successive generations. The old faith that Arthur was not dead but would return, healed of his wound, to help mankind, has its counterpart in modern Optimism, which looks forward to the steady improvement of the human race and its advance towards higher and nobler conditions.

It will be observed that the *Morte d'Arthur* is more closely modelled on Homer than are any of the Idylls. In fact, in the concentration of the interest on the hero, in the straightforward simplicity and martial terseness of the narrative, as well as in the strong vigour of its Saxon diction, this poem stands quite apart and in marked contrast to the great series in which it was subsequently inserted.

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The incidents in Arthur's career that immediately preceded his death are briefly these. The queen, Guinevere, had left the king's court, and fled to hiding at the nunnery of Amesbury, owing to the discovery by the treacherous Modred, the king's nephew, of her love for Lancelot. King Arthur had gone to attack Lancelot in the north, during his absence Modred had raised a revolt, and had had himself crowned king. The king marched south, and pursued Modred to the west coast. On his way he stopped at Amesbury, and had the farewell interview with the repentant queen so beautifully described in the Idyll of *Guinevere*. Arthur's host came up with that of Modred on the extreme south-west coast, and in the ensuing battle, Arthur slew

Modred with his own hand, but was himself mortally wounded in the encounter. The poem commences at the point where Arthur has just given and received the fatal blow.

1 So all day long 'So' = 'as above described,' and calls attention to the fact that the poem is supposed to be but a fragment of a larger work.

3 King Arthur's table, the knights of the Round Table, &c. of the order of knighthood established by King Arthur. The order is said to have taken its name from a large round table at which the king and his knights sat for meals. Such a table is still preserved at Winchester as having belonged to King Arthur. Some accounts say that there were 150 seats at this table, and that it was originally constructed to imitate the shape of the round world (see note to l. 235, below) by the wizard Merlin for Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father; that Uther gave it to Leodegrance, Guinevere's father, who presented it and 100 knights with it as a wedding gift to Arthur. One of the seats was called the *Siege* (i.e. seat) *Perilous*, because it swallowed up any unchaste person who happened to sit in it. Galahad the Pure was the only knight who could sit in it with safety. Other accounts say the Round Table was constructed in imitation of that used by Christ and His disciples at the Last Supper, that it contained thirteen seats, and that the seat originally occupied by Christ was always empty, unless it was occupied by the Holy Grail.

Other kings and princes besides Arthur had Round Tables. In the Reign of Edward I, Roger de Mortimer established a Round Table for the furtherance of warlike pastimes, and King Edward III is said to have done the same. 'To hold a Round Table' came to mean little more than holding a tournament.

The objects which Arthur had in view in founding this order are well described in the Idyll of *Guinevere* in the lines beginning —

"I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the king, as if he were
Their conscience and their conscience as their king "

man by man, one after another.

4 *Lyonnesse*, a fabulous country contiguous to Cornwall, said to be now covered by the sea. There is still extant in the south-west counties of England a tradition to the effect that the Scilly Islands were once part of the mainland. The region is thus described in *The Passing of Arthur*, 82, 83:—

"A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again "

The name is sometimes written *Leonnys*.

NOTES. '

6 **The bold Sir Bedivere** 'Bold' is what is called a 'permanent epithet,' since it is nearly always used along with the name of Bedivere. So, in Homer, Achilles is always 'swift footed,' and in Virgil, Æneas is always 'pious,' and in Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, William of Deloraine is always 'good at need.' In *The Coming of Arthur* (175, 176) Bedivere's boldness shows itself specially in his defence of Arthur's right to the throne —

"For bold in heart and act and word was he,
Whenever slander breathed against the King"

7 **the last, the only survivor**

9 **chancel**, the eastern and most sacred portion of a church, formerly always separated from the main part of the building by a screen of lattice-work (Lat. *cancelli*, cross bars)

Notice how the scenery typifies the condition of Arthur. His noble life and lofty purpose are in ruins like the broken chancel and cross — he lies on the narrow border land between the ocean of Life and the great, vague 'water' of Eternity

10 **strait**, a narrow tongue of land, the word is more usually applied to a narrow passage in the ocean

12 **a great water** Since the poet wishes to represent the general impression produced by the view from the chapel, he avoids all detail, and uses the vague words 'a water' instead of 'a lake.' The beholder would not at first sight notice whether it was a lake or a broad river, all he would be conscious of would be a spreading sheet of water of size and shape unknown; and the picture is presented to the reader just as it would first strike the eye of Sir Bedivere. Subsequently, where no such instantaneous impression is depicted, the words 'mere' and 'lake' are used. Cf. *Derwentwater*, *Gala Water*, etc.

14 **The sequel**, what follows as the result of this day's fight **unsolders**, disunites, breaks into pieces. *Solder* (from the same root as *solid*) is a kind of metallic cement for uniting the surfaces of metals, it is often composed of zinc (or silver) and copper. It is sometimes spelt and pronounced *sodder* or *sawder*.

15 **fellowship**, confederation, united band (of knights of the Round Table).

16 **Whereof record**, of all the fellowships of which, etc. **Such a sleep** The comparison of death to sleep is very common in Homer, Vergil, and other classical poets. Thus Homer, *Iliad*, xi 241, has κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὕπνον, 'he slept an iron sleep', cf. Vergil, *Æneid*, x 745, *ferreus urget somnus*, 'an iron sleep weighs down his eyes,' and Moschus's ἀτέρμονα νήγρετον ὕπνον, 'an endless sleep that knows no waking.' See also Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lxxviii 2, "Sleep, death's twin brother," which echoes Homer's Ὕπνῳ κασιγνήτῳ θανάτῳ (*Iliad*, xiv 231), and Vergil's

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consanguineus Leti sopor (*Aeneid*, vi 278) So in the Bible, *Acts*, vii 60, Stephen "fell on sleep," i.e. died Cf *cemetery*, literally 'sleeping-place'

21 Camelot, the city where Arthur held his court, now identified with a village called *Queen Camel*, in Somersetshire, where remains of the vast entrenchments of an ancient town are still to be seen The traditions of Queen Camel still preserve the name of Arthur, the bridge over the river Camel is called 'Arthur's Bridge,' and there is a spring in the neighbourhood called 'Arthur's Well' A description of Arthur's mysterious hall at Camelot is given in the Idyll of *The Holy Grail* in the lines beginning—

"O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago "

22 I perish made, my life, and with it all my noble purposes, is brought to ruin by those whom I was the first to form into one people See *The Coming of Arthur*, 15-19 —

"But either failed to make the kingdom one
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And through the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty principedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned "

23 Merlin, 'the great enchanter of the time,' the famous magician of the Arthurian legends "According to Geoffrey of Monmouth (lib vi cc 18, 19) Merlin had been court magician since the time of Vortigirn, who had caused him to be sought as the only one capable of relieving him out of the difficulty he had encountered in raising a castle on Salisbury Plain" (Note in Wright's *Malory*) Welsh traditions spell the name *Mereddin* and narrate that he was the Bard of Emrys Wledig, the Ambrosius of Saxon history, by whose command he built Stonehenge "The true history of Merlin seems to be that he was born between the years 470 and 480, and during the invasion of the Saxon took the name of Ambrose, which preceded his name of Merlin, from the successful leader of the Britons, Ambrosius Aurelianus, who was his first chief and from whose service he passed into that of King Arthur, the southern leader of the Britons" (Morley, *English Writers*, 1) Merlin is represented in *Merlin and Vivien* as the son of a demon and also as "the great Enchanter of the Time," and again as

"the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts, ;
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens,
The people call'd him Wizard—"

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His prophecy regarding Arthur's second coming is mentioned in *The Coming of Arthur*, 418-421 —

“And Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn,
Though men may wound him, that he will not die,
But pass, and come again ”

The Idyll of *Merlin and Vivien* gives an account of Merlin's fate
See also Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*

24 let what will be, be, whatever my future may be

27 **Excalibur** Arthur's magic sword In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, ii 3, the Lady of the Lake who had given Arthur the sword says, “The name of it is Excalibur, that is as much as to say Cut-steel ” According to the English romance of *Merlin*, the sword bore the following inscript in —

“Ich am y-hote Escalabore,
Unto a king a fair tresore ”;

and it is added —

“On Inglis is this writing,
Kerve steel and yren and al thing ”

In the French *Merlin* it is said that the name is a Hebrew word meaning ‘tres cher et acier fer,’ which is probably a printer's mis-correction of the true reading ‘trancher acier et fer,’ ‘to carve steel and iron’ Roquefort says ‘Ce mot est tiré de l'Hebreu et veut dire tranchefer,’ ‘this word is taken from the Hebrew and means *carve-iron*’ Cf the name *Taallefer*, i e ‘Iron-cutter’ Malory, iv 9, says, “And then he (Arthur) deemed treason, that his sword was changed, for his sword bit not steel as it was wont to do ” The sword and the way it came into Arthur's possession are described by Tennyson in *The Coming of Arthur*, 295-308 The name is also written *Escalabore* and *Caliburn* Arthur's lance was called *Rone* and his shield *Pridwin* Arthur had also a second-best sword, *Clarent*, and in *Merlin*, ii 9, he is described as capturing the Irish King Ryance's “excellent sword *Marandorse* ” Gawain had a sword called *Galatine*

The notion of enchanted armour is found in many old poets and romancers of all nations In the *Mahabharata* the magic bow of Arjuna is described under the name *Gandwa*, and Mukta Phalaketu in the *Kathá Sarit Ságara* (chap 115) is presented by Siva with a sword named *Invincible*

The names of some of the most celebrated of these enchanted weapons are given below —

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Ali's	sword,	<i>Zulfikan</i>
Cæsar's	„	<i>Crocea Mors</i>
Charlemagne's	„	<i>La Joyeuse</i>
Lancelot's	„	<i>Aroundight</i>
Orlando's	„	<i>Durindana.</i>
Siegfried's	„	<i>Balmung</i>
The Cid's	„	<i>Colada</i>

A list of some thirty-five such weapons is given in Brewer's *Dict. of Phrase and Fable*, s v *Sword*. Cf Longfellow's lines —

“It is the sword of a good knight,
Tho' homespun be his mail,
What matter if it be not hight ”
Joyeuse, Colada, Durindale,
Excalibar, or Aroundight ”

Spenser (*Faery Queen*, ii 8 l^y) calls Arthur's sword *Mordure*

31 Clothed in white samite The recurrence of this line recalls the ‘permanent epithets’ noticed under l 6. Such repetitions are frequent in Homer and Theocritus, and are found in Spenser and Milton. *Samite* is a rich silk stuff interwoven with gold or silver thread, derived from Gk *hex*, six, and *mitos*, thread of the warp, literally ‘woven of six threads’, cf *dimitry*. Tennyson has ‘red samite’ and ‘blackest samite’ in *Lancelot and Elaine*, and ‘crimson samite’ in *The Holy Grail*.

34 sung or told, celebrated in song or story

37 fling him Arthur regards the magic sword as a person endowed with life and power of its own. *mere*, lake or pool, the word originally meant ‘that which is dead,’ hence a desert, waste, or stagnant pool, cf Lat *mare* and Skt *maru*, a desert, from *mri*, to die, also French *mare* and English *marsh*.

38 seest, a dissyllable lightly, nimbly or quickly. Malory's words are—“My lord, said Sir Bedevere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly (I will) bring you word again.” ‘Lightly’ in this sense is common in Spenser's *Faery Queen*.

43 hest, from O E *hæts*, command, —commonly written with the prefix, *behest*. The *t* is an added letter as in *whils-t*. Chaucer uses *hest*, “the second *hest* of God,” *Pardoner's Tale*, 185, Spenser, *Faery Queen*, i 7 18, has “holy *heasts*,” and the word is frequently used by Shakspeare, as in *The Tempest*, i 2 274, iii 1 37, etc; it also occurs in *Pelleas and Etarre*, “acted her *hest*” at full, to the utmost, thoroughly.

47 mighty bones The bones of the Danish invaders heaped up in the church at Hythe are abnormally large sized, and seem to show that “there were giants in those days.”

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50 By zig-zag rocks The short, sharp vowel sounds and the numerous dental letters in this line, making it broken in rhythm and difficult to pronounce, are in fine contrast with the broad vowels and liquid letters which make the next line run smoothly and easily off the tongue. The sound in each line exactly echoes the sense, the crooked and broken path leads to the smooth and level shore.

51 levels The plural is probably suggested by the Latin plural, *aequora*. Or the poet may be hinting that what looks, when seen from the high ground, "a great water," becomes a series of flashing surfaces to the eyes of a man standing on the shore. In *The Lover's Tale* Tennyson has "the rippling levels of the lake."

55 keen with frost, clear in the frosty air. Cf. "The yule-clog sparkled keen with frost," *In Memoriam*, lxxviii 5.

57 topaz-lights The topaz is a jewel of various colours, yellow, or green, or blue, or brown. Perhaps from Skt *tapas*, fire. *jacinth*, another form of *hyacinth*, a precious stone of the colour of the hyacinth flower, blue and purple.

58 subtlest, most skilfully wrought, or in a most intricate pattern. Cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 297-299.

60 this way mind This expression is an imitation of Vergil, *Aeneid*, viii 20, *Atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc*, 'And he divides his swift mind now this way, now that'. Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, i 188, *ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ διδνδιχα μερμήριξεν*, 'and his heart within hesitated between two (opinions)'.

61 In act to throw, an expression much used by Pope in his translation of the *Iliad*. Cf. *Il.* iii 349, *ὠρυντο χαλκῷ*, which Pope renders—

["Atreides then] his massy lance prepares,
In act to throw."

63 many-knotted water flags, reeds, with numerous joints and with long leaves, that wave like flags in the wind.

65 So strode back slow These words are all accented, and the line thus becomes heavy and slow to pronounce, the rhythm thus echoes the heavy slow steps of Sir Bedivere.

70, 1 washing in the reeds—lapping on the crag It has been remarked that these two phrases mark exactly "the difference of sound produced by water swelling up against a permeable or impermeable barrier." The water would splash softly through the reeds, but would make a sharper sound when striking against the impenetrable rock. Mr Churton Collins (*Illustrations of Tennyson*) thinks that these two lines contain "two of the finest onomatopœic effects in our language." *Lap* means, generally, to 'lick up with the tongue, as a dog drinks', and hence, as here,

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to 'make a sharp sound as a dog does when drinking' Malory's words are, "I saw nothing but the waters wap (*i e* beat) and the waves wan (*i e* ebb)" [But in *Le Mort Arthur*, Bedivere answers that he sees nothing

"But watres depe and wawes wanne"

May not the 'wap' in Malory be a printer's error for 'depe,' *i e*, 'deep'? If so, 'wan' is also an adjective, as in "wan wave," in *The Coming of Arthur*, 129, and "wan water" in *Gareth and Lynette*, 803]

73 betray'd thy nature, been false to thy instinctive sense of honour and to thy title of knight Malory says, "And thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword"

75 fealty, a doublet of *fidelit*

80 As thou art lief and de *x* Copied from Malory *Lief* is from the same root as *love*, and means *beloved* Shakspeare (2 *Henry VI* 1 2 28) has '*alder-leafest*,' dearest of all

84 Counting pebbles In times of grave moment when the mind is absorbed in deep contemplation of some event of surpassing importance the senses often mechanically employ themselves in noticing trifling objects. Cf *Maud*, 11 2 8-15 —

"Strange, that the mind, when fraught
With a passion so intense
One would think that it well
Might drown all life in the eye—
That it should, by being overwrought,
Suddenly strike on a sharper sense
For a shell or a flower, little things
Which else would have been past by!"

86 chased, engraved *Chased* is a contraction of *enchased*, literally, *incased*, or 'enclosed in a case or cover', hence, 'covered with engraved ornament'

89 one worthy note, *i e* 'a thing worthy of note, a notable thing'

90 Should thus be lost, ought (according to natural expectation) to be lost

94 the bond of rule, the tie uniting the ruled to the ruler, the connecting link between a king and his subjects, which alone makes systematic government possible

99 empty breath, unsubstantial, impalpable report Bedivere is represented in *The Coming of Arthur* as a simple, honest knight who from the first accepts Arthur as an earthly king and does not trouble himself about the doubts and portents that heralded his coming So here with but a dim recognition of the

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spiritual nature of the King's mission, he deems it all important to preserve a material memorial of Arthur's life work.

100 **rumours of a doubt**, vague traditions of a mythical person

102 **joust** (also written *just*) a tournament or sham fight, literally, a 'coming close together, meeting,' from Lat *juxta*, near, close

104 **maiden of the Lake** Malory thus describes Arthur's first meeting with this lady. "With that they saw a damsel going on the lake What damsel is that?" said Arthur That is the Lady of the Lake, said Merlin, and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a palace as any on earth, and richly beseen" The Lady of the Lake is in some of the romances identified with Vivien Lancelot is called 'Lancelot of the Lake' from his having been educated at this lady's court, see the Idyll of *Lancelot and Elaine*, where the Lady is said to have stolen Lancelot from his mother's arms In the Idylls the Lady of the Lake is represented as typifying Religion See *The Coming of Arthur*, 282-293, and *Gareth and Lynette*, 210-219

108. **winning reverence**, gaining respectful admiration from his hearers for this romantic story

109 **now were lost**, would be lost if I were to throw the sword away

110 **clouded with his own conceit**, his power of clearly distinguishing right from wrong being obscured by his own false notion **Conceit**, conception, notion

112 **And so strode etc** The frequent repetition of single lines should be noticed, it is Homeric

113 **Spoke** Varied from *spake*, above, to prevent monotony So also Tennyson uses both *sung* and *sang*, *brake* and *broke*

119 **miserable**, mean, base

121 **Authority will** When the commanding look that inspires awe and obedience passes from the eye of a king, he loses therewith his authority over his subjects A critic has remarked that this personification (of authority) is "thoroughly Shakespearean; it assists the imagination without distressing the understanding, as when dwelt on and expanded in detail, deepening the impression of the sentiment by giving along with a true thought a grand picture" (Brimley's *Essays*) Cf Queen Elizabeth's words to Cecil "*Must*," she exclaimed, "*is must* a word to be addressed to princes" Little man, little man, thy father, if he had been alive, durst not have used that word, but thou hast grown presumptuous, because thou knowest that I shall die" (Lingard, *Hist of England*, vi 316) Cf also *Queen Mary*, v 5.—

"The Queen is dying or you dare not say it"

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122 laid widow'd, helplessly bereft Tennyson uses this bold metaphorical word again in his *In Memoriam*, xvii 20, "my widow'd race," and lxxxv 113, "My heart, though widow'd, may not rest," in *Aylmer's Field*, 720, "widow'd walls," and in *Queen Mary*, i 5, "widow'd channel"

125 offices, services, duty, cf *Lat officium*.

128 giddy, frivolous, transient

130 prosper, do his duty

132 with my hands Perhaps because he had now no sword, or, more probably, these words are introduced in imitation of Homer's habit of mentioning specific details cf ποσσιν *ἢε μακρὰ βῆδ'ας*, 'he went taking long steps with his feet' Cf Bible, *Psalms*, xlv 1 "We have heard with our ears", and *The Talking Oak*, 82 "Hear me with thine ears" Notice the touch of human personality in the king's sharp anger, otherwise Arthur is generally represented by Tennyson as a rather colourless being, and as almost "too good for human nature's daily food" Guinevere in *Lancelot and Elaine*, 121, 122, calls him

" . . . the faultless king,
That passionate perfection "

133 Then quickly rose etc "Every word tells of rapid, agitated, determined action, refusing to dally with temptation" (Brimley)

136 wheel'd, swung it round over his head

137 Made lightnings, made a succession of brilliant flashes

138 And flashing in an arch "A splendid instance of sound answering to sense, which the older critics made so much of; the additional syllable (in the last foot, *in an arch*) which breaks the measure and necessitates an increased rapidity of utterance, seeming to express to the ear the rush of the sword up its parabolic curve" (Brimley)

139 streamer of the northern morn, tongue of light of the *Aurora Borealis*, of which 'northern morn' is a translation Cf *The Talking Oak*, 275-276.—

"The northern morning o'er thee shoot,
High up in silver spikes!"

and Scott, *Lady of the Lake*, iv 9 —

"Shifting like flashes darted forth
By the red streamers of the north"

For similar instances of Tennyson's literal translations of classical expressions, see *Demeter*, 96, note

140 moving isles of winter, floating icebergs Observe how the poet in three lines presents a complete picture of one of nature's grandest phenomena, thus introducing a most vivid

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simile without interrupting the flow of the narrative. Notice the compression of style **shock**, collide

143 **dip**, went below *To dip* generally means 'to put under the surface'; here 'to go under'

148 **drawing thicker breath**, breathing more heavily as being nearer death

149 **Now see I by thine eyes** Arthur had no need now to ask of Bedivere if he had obeyed the command, the expression of the knight's eyes told enough The sudden exclamation is very dramatic

155 **three lives of mortal men** Homer (*Odys* iii 245) says of Nestor that he had been king during three generations of men In later times Nestor was called *τριγέρων*

166 **my wound cold** Malcroy's words are, "Alas, the wound in your head hath caught much cold"

167, 168 **half rose, slowly, with pain** The two long syllables at the end of one line, and the pauses after the first and second feet of the next line, admirably represent the slow and interrupted effort of the wounded king to rise

169 **wistfully**, with eager longing *Wistful* is probably a misspelling of *wishful*, from the mistaken idea that it was connected with O E *was*, know

170 **As in a picture**, as the eyes of a painted portrait often have a fixed and expectant gaze Cf Æschylus, *Agamemnon*, 240, *ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς*, '[She (Iphigenia) cast at each of those who sacrificed a piteous glance, standing out clear] as in a picture', and *The Day-Dream*, i 3 —

"Like a picture seemeth all"

177 **nightmare** A fiend or witch, supposed to cause evil dreams Skelton has "Medusa, that mare" (i.e. that hag)

182 **Clothed with his breath**, enveloped as by a cloak in a mist caused by his own damp breath clinging round him in the frosty air

183. **Larger than human** Cf the Idyll of *Guinevere*, 595 597 —

"The moony vapour rolling round the king,
Who seemed the phantom of a giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold"

Cf also *A Dream of Fair Women*, 87, and note; *The Princess*, vii 33, *Pelleas and Etarre*, 448, 449

185 **like a goad** The remorse he felt for his disobedience, and the fear that the king might suddenly die, urged him on as a goad urges oxen

186. **harness**, originally, as here, body-armour from the same

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root as *iron* Cf Bible, *1 Kings*, xx 11 "Let not him that guideth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off"

188 **bare black cliff clang'd** Observe the alliteration and the number of accented monosyllables succeeding each other, thus representing the successive reverberations of sound Wordsworth (*Skating*, 39-42) has a passage equally full of sound.—

"With the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud,
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron"

based, planted, the word is generally used in a metaphorical sense

190 **dint of armed heels**, the tread of iron-shod heels. Pronounce *armed*

193 **hove**, was lying Malory (xxi 5) writes, "And when they were at the water-side even fast by the bank hoved a little barge" Cf iv 28, "where hoved the two brethren abiding him," and xviii 10, "as he hoved in a little leaved wood" M E *houen*, *hoven*, to abide, of which *hoyer* is a frequentative form Spenser, *Faery Queen*, iii 10, 20, has "Which hoved close under a forest side"

195 **ware**, aware, cf Bible, *Acts*, xiv 6 "They were ware of it"

196 **dense**, thickly crowded

197 **Black-stoled** The *stole* was a long loose robe reaching to the feet. Cf "In stoles of white" (*Sir Galahad*, 43) With this description contrast that of the ship in *The Coming of Arthur*, 374, 375 —

"And all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks"

like a dream As unearthly and indistinct as images seen in a dream by these, near to them (were)

198. **Three Queens** These three queens are mentioned in *The Coming of Arthur*, 275-278 —

"Three fair Queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need"

Malory says, "One was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay, the other was the Queen of Northgales, the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands" The three queens are perhaps intended to typify the three great Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, Charity, who help the soul in its battle against evil

199 **shiver'd to the tingling stars**, thrilled as it mounted through the air and reached the stars that trembled in response. Cf. *The May Queen*, 136 —

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"Then seemed to go right up to heaven and die among the stars,"
and *Ænone*, 215 —

"Between the loud stream and the trembling stars"

In reply to the objection that this line "has a touch of exaggeration which belongs to the 'spasmodic' school," Mr Brimley remarks, "But the cry comes from a company of spirits amid mountains whose natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of night, the clearness of the winter air, and the hardening effects of frost. Such a cry, at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky in a hurtling storm of multitudinous arrow sounds, and die away in infinitely distant pulsations among the stars"

202 where no one comes "The mournfulness of the feeling a man would experience in such a place, from the sense of utter isolation and sterility, is blended with the naturally sad wail of the wind over a wide waste, and the addition thus becomes no mere completion of a thought of which only part is wanted for illustration . . . but gives a heightening of sentiment without which the illustration would be incomplete and less impressive" (Brimley) Compare Keats's—

"Undescribed sounds

That come a-swooning over hollow grounds

And wither wearily on barren moors."—285-287.

207, 208 rose the tallest fairest, rose above the others in height as she stood Malory says, "Morgan le Fay . . . that was as fair a lady as any might be"

210. complaining, lamenting Cf *The Lady of Shalott*, 120

"The broad stream in his banks complaining"

213 like the wither'd moon, like the moon when its light it fading before the early beams of the rising sun Cf. *Fatima*,—

"Faints like a dazzled morning moon"

Also Shelley, *Ode to the Skylark*, 13-16 —

"Keen as are the arrows Of that silver sphere

Whose intense lamp narrows In the white dawn clear"

215. greaves, armour for the lower part of the legs cuisses, armour for the thighs; Lat *coxa*, thigh dash'd with drops of onset, splashed with drops of blood from the encounter Cf *The Princess*, v 157, 158 —

"Though dashed with death,

He reddens what he kisses."

"Onset" is a very generic term, poetic because removed from all vulgar associations of common parlance, and vaguely suggestive not only of war's pomp and circumstance, but of high deeds also and heroic arts, since onset belongs to mettle and

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daring; the word, for vast and shadowy connotation, is akin to Milton's grand abstraction, 'Far off *his coming* shone,' or Shelley's 'Where the earthquake demon taught her young ruin'" (Roden Noel in *The Contemporary Review*) Cf *Ænone*, 184, "I shut my sight," and *A Dream of Fair Women*, 115, "The bright death quiver'd at the victim's throat," and *The Last Tournament*, 511.—

"Belted his body with her *white embrace* "

216. **light and lustrous, fair in colour and shining** Arthur is described in *The Coming of Arthur*, 329, 330, as "fair Beyond the race of Britons and of men "

217 **like a rising sun** The fair bright locks are compared to the rays surrounding the disc of the rising sun. Cf Milton, *Par. Lost*, III 625-627 —

"Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
Illustrious on his shoulders "

Arthur is thus described in *The Last Tournament*, 660-663. —

"That victor of the Pagan throned in hall,
His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow
Like hill-snow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light "

Cf *Tithonus*, 54 —

"Thy dim curls kindle into sunny rings "

In *Maud* we have "her sunny hair" and "her head sunning over with curls," and see *Ænone*, 58, and note

218 **High from the dais-throne**, as he sat on the throne elevated on the dais or platform *Dais* is from the same root as *disc*, and meant originally a quoit, then a round platter, then a "high table" or throne, and finally the raised platform on which a high table or a throne stands

224 **Shot thro' the lists**, as a brilliant meteor glances across the sky.

228 **my forehead and mine eyes** This definite specification of separate items, instead of using the general term 'face,' is true to the Homeric pattern; see I 132

232, 233. **the light myrrh** Arthur is compared with the star in the East which appeared at Christ's birth to the Magi, or Wise Men, and led them to Bethlehem, where they presented to the new-born Child offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh See Bible, *Matthew*, II. 11.

235. **image of the mighty world** "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right. For all the world,

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Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table, and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table, they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world" (Malory) The belief that the world was in form round and flat, like the top of a round table, prevailed even after the globe had been circumnavigated Cf *Columbus*, 58, 59.—

"for at last their Highnesses

Were half-assured this earth might be a sphere "

236 **companionless** Malory's words are, "Ah, my Lord Arthur, what shall become of me now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

237 **the days darken**, the future seems dark and dreary'

238 **other minds**, unsympathetic minds, different from those I have known

240 **The old to new**, a line often quoted It occurs also in *The Coming of Arthur*, 508, when the king is described as refusing to give tribute to Rome, on the ground that "the slowly fading mistress of the world" had had her day, and must give place to a new and stronger power Cf *In Memoriam*, Prologue, 17, 18 —

"Our little systems have their day,

They have their day and cease to be "

241 **God ways**, God has many methods of accomplishing on earth His purposes, which are part of His nature, and often lays aside the methods He has been using to replace them by others

242 **Lest one world**, lest men's hearts, relying too much upon old established usage, should stagnate and grow slothful for want of change, and thus a lifeless formalism should take the place of active belief and vigorous endeavour

Cf R. Browning, *James Lee's Wife* —

"Rejoice that man is hurled

From change to change unceasingly,

His soul's wings never furled "

243 **Comfort thyself etc** Malory's words are, "Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust to trust in For I will unto the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound, and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul."

244, 245 **that which pure**, may God accept my work and, absorbing it, as it were, into Himself, purify it of all its unworthy elements Cf *In Memoriam*, cxxxi. 4, "Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure "

249. **like a fountain.** Cf. *Enoch Arden*, 799.—

"Prayer

' Like fountains of sweet water in the sea."

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251 That nourish brain, whose brute nature is blind to anything outside or above what they can estimate by instinct or material sense Cf Shaks *Ant and Cleop* iv. 8 21 —

“A brain that nourishes our nerves”

254 every way, on all sides

255. Bound by gold chains Cf. *Harold*, iii 2:—

“prayer,

A breath that fleets beyond this iron world
And touches him that made it”

The notion of the earth being attached to heaven by a golden chain perhaps originated in the passage in Homer's *Iliad*, viii 19-30, cf Plato, *Theat* 153 Frequent allusions to this supposition are to be found scattered throughout English literature Thus Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*, I 1 says, “According to the allegory of the poets the highest link of nature's chain must needs be tied to the foot of Jupiter's chair” • cf *Adv of L* II vi. Jeremy Taylor writes, “Faith is the golden chain to link the penitent sinner to God” Cf also “This is the golden chain of love, whereby the whole creation is bound to the throne of the Creator” (Hare), and

“She held a great gold chaine ylincked well,
Whose upper end to highest heaven was knitt”

—Spenser, *F Q* ii 7 46

“hanging in a golden chain

This pendent world”—Milton, *Par Lost*, ii. 1051, 1052

“For, letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upward to the sky”

—Dryden, *Character of a Good Parson*, 19, 20

259 island-valley of Avilion Avilion, or, as it is otherwise spelt Avelion, or Avalon (“dozing in the Vale of Avalon,” *The Palace of Art*, 167), is supposed to have been the name of a valley in the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, the town in Somersetshire where Joseph of Arimathea is said to have first landed from his boat with the Holy Grail [See the Idyll of *The Holy Grail*] Avilion is called an island as being nearly surrounded by the “river's embracement.” Cf. Drayton, *Polyolbion*, iii —

“O three-times famous isle! where is the place that might
Be with thyself compared for glory and delight
Whilst Glastonbury stood?”

Some romances, however, make it an ocean island “not far on this side of the terrestrial Paradise,” and represent it as the abode of Arthur and Morgan Le Fay. Compare with these myths the accounts of the “Islands of the Blest,” the “Fortunate Islands” of Greek and Roman legends, whit'er the

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favourites of the Gods were *cc*hout dying (see *Ulysses*, l 63), also the tales of the "Flying Island of St Brandan" Many legends tell of various enchanted islands, and the names of a number of them may be found in the *Voyage of Maeldune*.

260, 261 **Where falls loudly** Cf the description of the abode of the Gods in *Lucretius*, also the accounts of Elysium in Homer, *Odys* iv 566, and *Lucretius*, *De Rerum Nat* iii 20, and *Bion*, iii. 16, and of Olympus in Homer, *Odys* vi 42-45

262. **Deep meadow'd**, a translation of the Greek *βαθύλειμος*, 'with rich fertile meadows,' Homer, *Iliad*, ix 151 **happy** Cf Vergil, *Georg* i 1, *lætæ segetes*, 'happy (i.e. plenteous) harvest' orchard lawns, grassy plots with fruit trees growing on them ('Avilion' is said to mean 'Isle of Apples,' from the Breton *aval*, apple)

263 **crowned with summer sea**, ringed round with stormless waves as with a coronet Cf Homer, *Odys* x 195, *περὶ νῆσον πόντος ἐστεφάνωται*, 'round the island the sea lies like a crown' The surrounding sea is elsewhere (*Maud*, iv 6) called by Tennyson,

"The silent sapphire-spangled marriage ring of the land"

Cf. Sir J Davies, *Orchestra*, 337, 338 —

"The sea that fleets about the land,
And like a girdle clips her solid waist"

With "summer sea" compare Wordsworth, *Skating* —

"And all was tranquil as a summer sea"

267 **ere her death** The tradition that the swan previously to her death sings a sweet song is one of long standing See *The Dying Swan*, also Shaks, *Othello*, v 2, 247, "I will play the swan and die in music," and many other passages Mr Nicol says of the *Cygnus Musicus*, "Its note resembles the tones of a violin, though somewhat higher Each note occurs after a long interval The music presages a thaw in Iceland, and hence one of its greatest charms"

268 **Ruffles her pure cold plume**, unfolds her white clear wing-feathers **takes the flood**, strikes the water

269 **swarthy webs**, alluding to the dark colour of the swan's webbed feet

270 **Revolving many memories** Cf the Latin *multa animo revolvens*, 'revolving many things in his mind'

271 **one black dot dawn**, a single speck of black on the bright horizon where the day was dawning The dawn of the first day of a new year typifies the rise of the new era which was to succeed that of Arthur from this point

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new"

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